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Miss. Baptists respond to major disaster

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

The Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force was activated shortly after a devastating storm front moved through several counties in the state on April 24, taking ten lives and injuring hundreds.

In what is being called the worst storm to hit Mississippi since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, an EF-4 tornado packing winds of 170 miles per hour tore through Louisiana before jumping the Mississippi River and entering Warren County. Yazoo, Holmes, and Choctaw counties were also hit hard.

The mass feeding unit from Briar Hill Church in Florence has been providing meals for victims of the storm and emergency workers since the morning of April 25. The unit had prepared between 5,000 and 7,500 meals by April 26.

According to Don Gann, consultant in the Men's Ministry Department, of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, three chainsaw teams plus other teams conducting assessment and church support were also in Yazoo County.

Miles east of Yazoo City, Chester Church near Ackerman sustained roof and water damage. Church members, with some assistance from other individuals and churches in the area, already had tarps on the roof and cleanup had begun.

"I think we're doing well," said David Bryant, pastor of First Church, Yazoo City. "Our community is coming together, and I see folks uniting."

"As soon as the storm went over our house and we didn't have any damage, my son and I got in the truck with a chainsaw," said Bryant. "We hadn't gone far before a lady flagged us down. She was looking for someone with a chainsaw because someone was trapped under a tree. We cut them out, and afterwards we went out in the county where some of our widows lived."

"We ended up climbing through almost four miles of treetops, because we'd heard that there were some people injured. My wife is a nurse practitioner, so she was able



AFTER THE STORM — Workmen survey the damage at Chester Church, near Ackerman, in the aftermath of the tornado which cut a wide swath across Mississippi on April 24. The church sustained roof and water damage. (Photo by Tony Martin)

to help. We spent the better part of the day Saturday climbing through treetops."

In Choctaw Association, the tornado did significant damage. Roy Hawkins, associational missions director, was working at Mt. Moriah Church on April 26. Mt. Moriah Church is located on top of a hill and had no damage. Five hundred yards away, several homes were destroyed down to the foundation. Church members and other volunteers were providing food to any people who came by needing assistance. "A lot of people in the area are helping out — we've got diapers, baby food, other things that we are making available to everyone," said Hawkins. "It's just by God's grace that no more people were killed."

Hawkins noted the children in Choctaw County that died in the storm. "These children were from a poor family, and we've been trying to help them out. Enough money has been collected to pay for burying them."

"People ask a lot of questions at a time like this," said Hawkins, "and I just have to remind them that Scripture says that all creation groans in travail because of human sin."

"Right now, we're assessing what our needs are," said Bryant. "We are going to need help more later than we do right now. FEMA has to do their assessments, so we are helping a lot of folks right now, mostly with cleaning up houses and yards."

"It's like a mile-and-a-half wide Bush Hog or Weedeater came through," Bryant stated, "but the thing I'd most like for folks to pray about is that God has given us an opportunity to minister and to reach people with hope and help. We have open doors that we otherwise wouldn't have. We need to make the most of this opportunity, and pray that our community would come together across racial and social and even denominational lines. We need to demonstrate Matthew 5:15, that our light would shine and glorify our Father Who is in heaven."

"I want to say thank you," Bryant added. "I've had calls from Vancouver, from New York, Florida, North Carolina, from all over the county. There have been emails, and people have Facebooked me expressing their prayers and concerns."

"A lot of people are praying for us right now."

Rankin: missionaries to be appointed May 6 in Jackson

By Jerry Rankin, President
International Mission Board

God is at work in our world! We hear thrilling reports of His activity around our globe, and He continues to call out servants from among Southern Baptists to carry the Gospel to all the peoples of the world.

We would like to invite you and your congregation to join us on Thursday, May 6, as we celebrate the appointment of 30 new missionaries at First Church, Jackson. The appointment service begins at 6:30 p.m. You will hear testimonies of the appointees, learn about the urgent needs around the world, and touch the lives of the missionaries by assuring them of your prayers and support.



Rankin

This will be my 100th appointment service since becoming president of IMB and the final one before retiring to return to Mississippi. I encourage you to come participate in the worship, praise, and inspiration of this unique service.

Sending out new missionaries to the ends of the earth is one of the most exciting things Southern Baptists do. I encourage you to bring your congregation to what may be for some a once in a lifetime experience. Many have noted that attending an appointment service has been one of the most impactful events of their Christian life. It personalizes the significance of faithful stewardship and giving to the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

Thank you for your continuing support and involvement in missions. Many around the world are experiencing new hope and peace in Christ because of your efforts.

White House appeals Day of Prayer ruling

WASHINGTON (BP) — The Obama administration will appeal a federal judge's ruling that invalidated the National Day of Prayer.

The decision was revealed April 22, a day after members of Congress gathered at a Capitol Hill news conference to urge the White House to work vigorously to overturn the decision. Joining the U.S. House of Representatives members in calling for action by the U.S. Justice Department were the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville and other organizations.

Barbara Crabb, a Wisconsin federal judge appointed by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, ruled April 15 that a law setting a National Day of Prayer violated the U.S. Constitution's

First Amendment prohibition on government establishment of religion. She said the observance "serves no purpose but to encourage a religious exercise, making it difficult for a reasonable observer to see the statute as anything other than a religious endorsement."

The U.S. Department of Justice informed Wisconsin's Western District Court of its decision to appeal Crabb's ruling to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. The Seventh Circuit consists of federal courts in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana.

More than two dozen House members joined together April 21 in support of the National Day of Prayer. Reps. Randy Forbes, R-Va., and Mike McIntyre, D-N.C., co-chairmen of the

Congressional Prayer Caucus, led their colleagues in calling for the Obama administration to file an appeal and in announcing the introduction of House resolutions supporting the annual observance.

The representatives expressed sharp disagreement with Crabb's opinion.

Extrapolating Crabb's reasoning in her 66-page decision, "you would have to determine that if the Declaration of Independence were written today and presented to this judge, she would make one of two determinations," Forbes, a Southern Baptist, told reporters. "She would either say that the signers of that document did not mean what they said when they said that our rights came from God Himself, from a Creator, and that they were pledging their lives, and their fortunes and their sacred honor to defend that proposition or she would determine that it was unconstitutional."

ERLC Vice President Barrett Duke said, "[W]e are deeply offended by the fact that this judge would decide that the National Day of Prayer actually establishes religion... I think her understanding of the establishment of religion exceeds the founding fathers' understanding of what that means."

Baptists "certainly agree with the need to keep government out of religion," Duke told reporters, "and yet, you would be hard pressed to find very many Baptists who actually believe that the Day of Prayer actually establishes religion. The vast majority, of Baptists do not believe the National Day of Prayer consti-

tutes the establishment of religion in this country."

Congress established National Day of Prayer as an annual event in 1952. In 1988, the law was amended to set the first Thursday of May for its observance.

The 1988 law states, "The President shall issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Prayer on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups and as individuals."

Duke and members of Congress said the law does not coerce Americans to participate but says they "may" observe the occasion.

Crabb's opinion does not take effect until all appeals have been exhausted. The White House has said President Obama will recognize this year's National Day of Prayer, which will be observed May 6.

Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, introduced a resolution April 20 saying it is the sense of the House that the National Day of Prayer is constitutional. Rep. Todd Tiahrt, R-Kan., offered a resolution April 21 calling for the Obama admin-

istration to appeal Crabb's decision and supporting the Day of Prayer.

Some speakers at the news conference expressed their belief the opinion would be struck down. "The decision by Judge Crabb must, and certainly will, be overturned," Duke said. "Only someone with an overly strict separatist view of the relationship between faith and government would consider the law to be unconstitutional."

The ERLC "will be actively engaged in a judicial repudiation of this deeply flawed opinion," he said.

Other speakers at the news conference included representatives from the American Center for Law and Justice, Family Research Council, and Concerned Women for America. Former Congressman Tony Hall, who sponsored the 1988 law establishing a date for the National Day of Prayer, also spoke.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, an organization of atheists and agnostics based in Madison, Wis., brought suit against the president in 2008, charging the observance violates the separation of church and state.

Graham, Obama meet in N.C.

MONTREAT, N.C. (BP) — U.S. President Barack Obama visited with evangelist Billy Graham April 25, becoming the 12th consecutive chief executive to meet Graham and the first sitting president to do so at the minister's North Carolina home. Obama and the 91-year-old Graham talked for about 30 minutes, and Graham gave Obama two Bibles — one for him and one for First Lady Michelle Obama. The visit came at the end of a short vacation for Obama in Asheville and just before he spoke at a memorial service in West Virginia for the 29 miners who died during the April 5 tragedy. Graham's son Franklin was present during the meeting. "The conversation was very cordial, very nice," Franklin Graham said, according to the Associated Press. "When the president got ready to leave, the president prayed for my father, my father prayed for him." Every president since Harry Truman has met Graham, with many of the meetings coming at the White House. "Reverend Graham has obviously been an important spiritual leader to past presidents," deputy press secretary Bill Burton said, according to The Washington Post. "He's a real treasure to our country, and the president appreciates the opportunity to visit him at his home." Graham has "some of the creaks that come with advancing age" but is "still as sharp as he ever was," Burton said. Said Franklin Graham, according to AP, "It's like my father rises to the occasion."

Looking back

10 years ago

The Holman Christian Standard Bible translation is listed on the top 10 "General Versions and Translations" sales chart in the April 2000 issue of CBA Marketplace, a monthly magazine of the Christian Booksellers Association.

20 years ago

Students from the six Southern Baptist seminaries form an organization called Sons and Daughters of the SBC, and have called for "an end to denominational strife and for freedom to minister unhindered, as called by God." The group is not sponsored by any other organization.

50 years ago

Baker J. Cauthen, executive secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, announces that the 1959 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering breaks all records, with \$7,571,684.58 received to date.



THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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YOU CAN RESPOND
RIGHT NOW!

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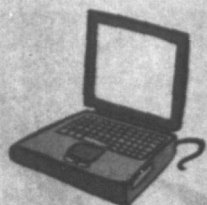
1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Supreme hint

WASHINGTON (BP) — U.S. President Barack Obama said April 21 he won't have a litmus test for his next U.S. Supreme Court nominee, but strongly hinted he wants the person to uphold the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized all types of abortion during all nine months of pregnancy. Obama made the remarks prior to a meeting with bi-partisan members of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, which will hold hearings on the president's pick to succeed retiring Justice John Paul Stevens. Stevens was nominated to the high court by former U.S. President Gerald Ford. At age 90, Stevens is the fourth longest serving justice in the court's history. Asked if he would be willing to nominate someone who did not support legalized abortion, Obama restated his pro-choice views. "I am somebody who believes that women should have the ability to make often very difficult decisions about their own bodies and issues of reproduction. Obviously this has been a hugely contentious issue in our country for a very long time. I will say the same thing that every president has said since this issue came up, which is I don't have litmus tests around any of these issues." He added, "...but I will say that I want somebody who is going to be interpreting our Constitution in a way that takes into account individual rights, and that includes women's rights, and that's going to be something that's very important to me, because I think part of what our core constitutional values promote is the notion that individuals are protected in their privacy and their bodily integrity, and women are not exempt from that."



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Who knew?

"KEEP IT BETWEEN THE
DITCHES!"



There's an old pop song, the theme of which is expressed repeatedly in the refrain: "Money can't buy me love." Apparently, that's still true among young people today.

While the mass media portray American youth as dope-smoking, hedonistic Spring Breakers downing mass quantities of alcohol and stripping for the latest Girls Gone Wild video, that's apparently not a true picture of a large majority of them.

According to an extensive survey conducted jointly in 2007 by Associated Press and MTV network — certainly not known as bastions of conservatism and family values — spending time with family was the top answer to the question, "What makes you happy?"

The next highest response to that question was spending time with friends, followed by spending time with a "significant other." Nearly 75% of the young people surveyed also said their relationship with their parents makes them happy.

"They're my foundation," said 17-year-old Queens, N.Y., high schooler Kristiana St. John, of her parents, in an Associated Press article on the survey results. "My mom makes me feel that even if I do something stupid, she's still going to love me no matter what. Just knowing that makes me very happy and blessed."

Wow. Who knew? That's certainly not the message parents are getting from the culture.

Could there be a disconnect between what the Hollywood types are telling us and what is actually the truth?

Money is apparently not that important to young people, either. "[A]lmost no one said 'money' when asked what makes them happy..." the Associated Press article reported.

Well, what about sex? Surely sex makes young people happy, since virtually every television show and movie portray them as ready for sex anytime, anywhere, with anyone.

Not necessarily. The survey indicated that young people between 13-17 years of age find sex leads to less happiness, while young people 18-24 reported sex might lead to momentary happiness but not in general.

Overwhelmingly, young people think marriage would make them happy and want to be married some day," the Associated Press article stated. "Most also want to have kids."

Spirituality ranked high among the young people surveyed. More than half said religion and spirituality were either "very important" or "the single most important" aspect of their lives.

There were some troubling aspects of the survey, too. Considerably fewer minority young people reported being happy with their lives, with Hispanic young people more pessimistic about happiness than African-Americans. Forty percent of young people who said they consumed alcohol within the last seven days said they were happy with themselves — but 68% of those who didn't drink described themselves as happy.

Overall, the Associated Press/MTV survey should be encouraging to parents struggling to raise decent, Godly young people in a polluted American society. If the survey proves anything, it proves that many of the people in the movie, television, and music industries — both behind the camera and in front of it — are at best out of touch and at worst, sociopathic.

The survey also implies that young people desire to be happy in life and want to do what is right to achieve that happiness. As Christians, we have received immeasurable joy through our relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That must be our message to young people growing up in such a toxic cultural environment: Their hope to ultimate happiness can only be found in Jesus.

The hour is short and the war is brutal, but we have a whole generation to save from the dark forces of hopelessness that surround them. They are looking to us.

Are we up to the task?

GUEST OPINION:

The faces of heaven

By Terry Dorsett
Barre, Vermont



It's not exactly the most ambitious plan, but it was the best I could do given the racial make-up of our state.

Over the past five years, we have had a small presence of minorities in our congregation and God has been answering our prayers as that portion of our congregation has slowly been growing. I guess I did not realize just how much God had answered my prayers until one recent Sunday.

Leaving an elders meeting, I walked past one of our children's Sunday School classes and realized that the Anglo children were only one-third of the attendees in that particular

class. The other children were African American and Asian American. I stopped in my tracks and just stood looking through the window into the class thanking God for showing me a picture of what the faces of heaven would be like.

Thinking that class might be an anomaly, I walked across the lobby to look into another class. My smile got bigger as I realized that class was evenly split between Anglo children and African American children. We only have three children's Sunday School classes at our church, so I decided to go look in the third class and see what it looked like. I was pleased to

notice that it was evenly split between Anglo children and Asian American children.

Admittedly, these three classes are all small, so the total number of children in them was limited, but the racial mixture represented must be something like the faces we will see in heaven and it was deeply moving to me as a pastor.

I am reminded of what the Apostle John wrote in Revelation 7:9-10, "After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were robed in white with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God."

My prayer of gratitude is, Thank you Lord for showing me the faces of heaven! Help us be faithful in serving You as one people.

Dorsett is director of the Green Mountain Association in Barre, Vt. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. For information, visit VermontBaptist.org.

Silsby sent to stand trial in Haiti for 'irregular travel'

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP and local reports) — A Haiti judge dropped kidnapping and criminal association charges against jailed Baptist volunteer Laura Silsby and nine others April 26 but ordered Silsby to face trial on another charge, meaning she will remain in prison.



Silsby

CNN reported that Judge Bernard Saint-Vil ordered Silsby to face trial on an "arranging irregular travel" charge, which carries a sentence for those convicted of six months to three

years in prison. CNN said Saint-Vil dropped all charges against the other nine volunteers, all of whom were previously released and allowed to fly back to the United States with charges still pending.

The 10 Baptists were arrested Jan. 30 because they allegedly did not have the proper documents to cross the border and take 33 children to an orphanage being set up in the Dominican Republic. The Baptists say they had the documents Haiti officials told them to have.

Saving children orphaned by the earthquake, they said, was their goal, but news reports since their arrest have indicated that some of the children had living relatives who survived the earthquake.

Paul Thompson, pastor of Eastside Church in Twin Falls, Idaho, who was one of the 10 arrested, expressed frustration that Silsby will face trial, saying "all nine of us were with Laura on the days" she allegedly broke the irregular travel law. "If I'm innocent of irregular travel, then Laura Silsby is innocent of irregular travel," Thompson told Baptist Press.

More than 100 people, including some from the group of 10, rallied on the steps of the Idaho state capital April 24 in support of Silsby. Much of the rally was spent in prayer for her.

"It's just a huge blessing to be here with God's people to remember her," Nicole Lankford, who spent nearly three weeks in jail with Silsby, told KTVB-TV at the rally. "The church, not just here, but in America, is standing up and doing what we're called to do in praying for her and remembering her."

Another member of the

group, Charisa Coulter, also attended the rally. After eight group members were released Feb. 18, Coulter and Silsby remained in jail together until March 8, when Coulter was released. Coulter called leaving Silsby alone in jail "one of the hardest days of my entire life."

"She's always on my mind," Coulter told the TV station. "It's like a rollercoaster, you have highs and you have lows."

Silsby, Coulter, and Lankford all are members of Central Valley Church in Meridian. Monday was Silsby's 87th day in jail.

Franklin Graham dumped from Pentagon's National Day of Prayer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Backlash over evangelist Franklin Graham speaking at the Pentagon as part of the National Day of Prayer observance has prompted the U.S. Army to rescind an invitation it had extended to the National Day of Prayer Task Force.

Graham, son of Billy Graham and this year's honorary National Day of Prayer Task Force chairman, is being criticized for comments he has made in the past expressing his belief that Islam is a dangerous religion.

Mike Weinstein, founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates April 19 "demanding" that the Pentagon choose a more inclusive speaker for the event.

According to Reuters, the Army said it did not invite Graham to speak at the event organized through the Pentagon chaplain's office. The invitation was extended to the task force, which in turn asked Graham to speak.

"Once the Army leadership became aware that Reverend Graham was speaking at this event, we immediately recognized it as problematic," Col. Tom Collins, an Army spokesman, said. "The bottom line here is that his presence would be inappropriate. His past statements are not consistent with the multi-faith emphasis and inclusiveness of this event."

In a statement released April 22, Graham said he regrets that the Army felt it was necessary to rescind the invitation to the

task force, and he expressed strong support for the U.S. military and said he would continue to pray for the troops.

During an appearance on Fox News the same day, Graham, president of the international Christian relief organization Samaritan's Purse, reiterated a concern for Muslim people worldwide.

"I love Muslim people, and I want Muslims everywhere to know what I know, that God loves us, that He sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world to take our sins and He died for our sins and rose from the grave and that Christ can come into their heart and change them and they can have the hope of eternal life, salvation," Graham said on Fox.

"I want them to know that they don't have to die in a car bomb. They don't have to die in some kind of holy war to be

accepted by God, but it's through faith in Jesus Christ and Christ alone," he said.

Graham said that while he loves the people of Islam, he does not agree with the religion, describing true Islam's treatment of women as "horrid." The evangelist also said his son is serving his fourth tour of duty in Afghanistan with the U.S. military, and he prays for the military every day.

"I pray not only for my son that God would put a hedge of protection around him and his men, but I pray for his commanding officers and our generals, that God would give them wisdom and not only wisdom but that God would give them success over our enemies," Graham said.

"We're in war, and we need to pray for our military. We need to pray for our president and all of those in authority.

That's what the National Day of Prayer is all about. It's not about Islam versus Christianity or whatever. It's about the nation coming together and praying for its leadership."

The Army's decision comes one week after a federal judge ruled that a law setting a National Day of Prayer violates the First Amendment's prohibition on government establishment of religion. The Obama administration has announced that it will appeal the ruling, which Graham said is based on puzzling logic.

"At a time when our country is waging two wars, approval ratings for Congress are at historic lows, unemployment is at a 70-year high and financial institutions have collapsed around us, I can't imagine anyone seriously opposing a National Day of Prayer," Graham said in a statement.

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REVIVALS AND HOMECOMINGS

1. Strayhorn Church, Sarah: Revival, May 2 - 5; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; John Mahoney, speaker; Megan Tate, music; Mike Porter, pastor.
2. Sunrise Church, Petal: Revival, May 2 - 5; Sun., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.; worship, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Jim Futral, speaker; R.E. Thompson, music; Gerald Buckley, pastor.
3. Poplar Springs Church, Mendenhall: Revival, May 2 - 6; Jerry Chaddick, speaker; Ed Meadows, music; for more information, call (601) 847-2555.
4. Larue Church, Larue Community: Homecoming, May 2, followed by lunch; revival, Mon. - Thurs., 7 p.m.; Wayne Myers, speaker; Richard and Kay Wheat, music.
5. Salem Church (Kellis' Store), Kemper County: Homecoming, May 2; singing, 10:30 a.m., followed by dinner on the grounds. Jerry Jones, pastor.
6. Macedonia Church, Petal: Senior Adult Revival, May 2 - 4; Sun., Senior Adult day; services, 8:30, 10:30 a.m.; luncheon, 11:30 a.m. and services, 6 p.m.; Mon., covered dish supper, 6 p.m.; choir rehearsal, 6:30 p.m.; service, 7 p.m.; Tues., covered dish supper, 6 p.m.; mini concert with Billy Nelson, 6:30 p.m.; service, 7 p.m.; Jimmy Garrard, Dean Register, and Don Boone, speakers; Billy Nelson, music; Mark Farris, pastor.
7. Valley Hill Church, Greenwood: Homecoming, May 2; Johnny Walker, speaker; Still Blessed, music.
8. New Salem Church, McCall Creek: Homecoming, May 2; service, 10 a.m.; Howard Smith, speaker.
9. Hickory Flat Church, Hickory Flat: Revival, Apr. 29 - May 2; Thurs. - Sat., 7 p.m.; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Keith Carpenter, speaker; Anthony Mitchell, music; Johnny Rakestraw, pastor.
10. First Church, Bellevue, Hattiesburg: Revival, May 2 - 5; Sun., 10:15 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 6:30 p.m.; Danny Henderson, speaker; Phillip Willis, music; Jim Roberson, pastor.
11. Mt. Vernon Church, Liberty: Revival, Apr. 30 - May 2; Fri. - Sat., 7 p.m.; Sun., 11 a.m.; Stacy McCullom, speaker; Rev. & Mrs. Clint Penalber, music.

A CHURCH FIGHT

Recently I was visiting with a man who told me about a church in his area that all they did was fight. They fought about everything. They would just show up on Sunday to fight. It did not matter what the issue was, let's just fight — music, programs, pastor, changes in schedule, the future, the past, or the present — all are good reasons to fight. I am fairly confident that they did not have a mission statement on the wall somewhere that said, "The high calling under God is to come together periodically and fight," but that is what they did or, more correctly stated, what they do.

The Apostle Paul writes to the young preacher Timothy and tells him and us, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). When he wrote that, I am not altogether sure about everything that he had in mind, but I do not believe his intention was to tell the church to stay with their fists balled up, angry, on the edge of exploding, and their attitude generally rotten to the core. Sadly, there are some churches that if they are not fighting they are not functioning.

As sad as that may seem, some churches apparently do not realize that what they are doing is not just hurting the people they want to fight and win the battle or the argument over, but it is hurting the very cause for which they are suppose to exist. Unending fighting hurts the relationships they have with each other, demoral-

izes the spirit of the saints who want to do something positive, damages their credibility with the community, and distorts the view of genuine Christianity to their own children. It is sad to say and incredible even to think that some churches might have a better witness for Christ if they did not exist. At least in some cases they would not be damaging other souls. It is a heart-breaking, ugly thing to see a family fight.

Years ago, I had the funeral of a man who was survived by nine children. These kids had never gotten along and now they were married with families of their own. They just detested each other and stayed away from each other. At the man's death, I told the funeral director to let me know when they were going to come and make arrangements. I would come and meet with the kids and maybe could help them to get through this loss in a civil and conciliatory manner. The funeral director called me only to say that the kids were not coming in to make the arrangements. They could not even get together to make decisions concerning their father's funeral. Finally, one of them came and made some hasty and thoughtless decisions and left.

None of the kids planned to come to the visitation before the funeral. There was no family seating at the funeral. They just

scattered out across the congregation apart from each other the best they could. When we got to the cemetery not one of the kids would come and sit under the tent where the interment was going to be. They stood in a large circle around the tent not wanting to have anything to do with each other. It was one of the strangest and saddest funeral experiences that I have ever been a part of, and it was difficult to speak words of comfort to the family because no one cared. It was impossible to get them to connect with each other and minister to the family even at such a sad time.

I remember that for days following the funeral people were talking about the way the kids acted and the way this man's grown children treated each other and even others who came and spoke to them. It is sad to see a family fight, but that cannot even be compared

with the sadness brought on a community or a town when the family of God begins to fuss and fight. When that happens it is not the reputation of individuals or the influence of a church that is at stake, but it is the harmful reflection on the Kingdom of God.

Paul challenged Timothy to fight the good fight of faith. There is a sense in which he was calling on Timothy to fight against fighting and instead choose to battle to do good, to be helpful, to encourage others, and lift those who had fallen. This week get in the fight and fight to do good, fight to bless others, and fight to honor our Lord Jesus. Watch what happens when you fight this kind of fight. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

The author can be contacted at jfutral@mbcb.org.

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BQV, SZEQOB LFOZ EQ.

XZBF NCJ: RZVOU-
RCKQ

Clue: R = F

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Romans Six: Twenty-Three

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



10. Faith Church, Hickory Flat



11. Edna Church, Columbia



12. Goodwater Church, Magee



13. Strayhorn Church, Sarah



14. Wanilla Church, Lawrence County

10. Twenty-two members of Faith Church, Hickory Flat, had a spring cleaning of the church building and grounds Apr. 10. The youngest worker was five-year-old Madison Ash, who was presented with special recognition by pastor William G. Dowdy. Shown are the participants.

11. Edna Church, Columbia, celebrated its spring festival Mar. 14. Shown are Lynn Tunes and AnnaRae Brister.

12. The Goodwater Church, Magee's, Mission Friends, RA's, GA's, and Acteens collected \$569 for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering during their Penny Race for Annie. Shown are Kristen Walker, Chloe Booth, and Caroline Booth.

13. Strayhorn Church, Sarah, recently ordained Kenny Hawkins and Tony Johnson as deacons. Shown are Gary Black, Hawkins, Johnson, and pastor Mike Porter.

14. Wanilla Church, Lawrence County, is a supporter of Hospice Ministries, Inc., of Brookhaven, and the organization recently held an appreciation dinner for supporters. Shown are Hospice Ministries director Iris Waldrop, Dorothy Jackson, Marlene Davis, Eve Pennington, Martha Rowland, and pastor Gene Rowland.

15. Pheba Church, Pheba, had four members go to Talanga, Honduras, Feb. 6 - 13 with the group Baptist Medical Dental International. The four were involved in roof construction for a church and children's ministry. Shown are Roger Johnston, Danny White, Betty Walker, and Teddy Walker.



15. Pheba Church, Pheba

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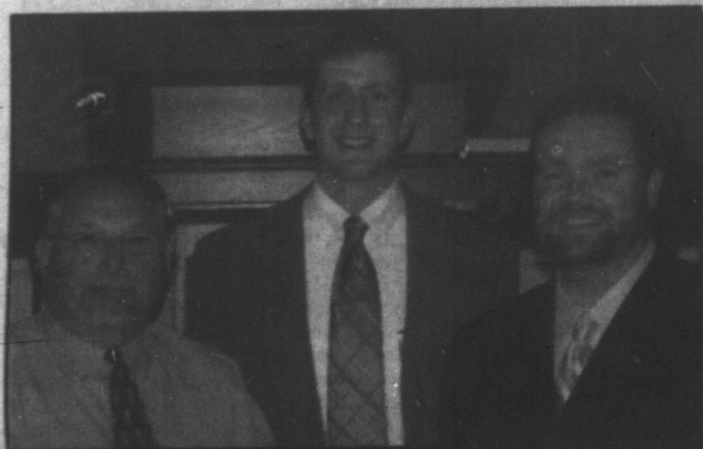
STATE CHANGES

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



2. The Sumerhills



3. Brasher ordination



4. Freeny Church, Carthage



5. Springdale Church, Attala County

1. First Church, Morton, honored Holmes and Carmel Carlisle for their many years of service to Morton and Scott County with a special service and reception. Before his retirement, Carlisle was director of the Scott County Association.

2. Dax Summerhill, pastor, First Church, Calhoun City, recently received his doctoral degree from Mid-America Seminary. Shown are Myrick Summerhill, Joshua Summerhill, Summerhill, Laurie Summerhill, and Sara Jane Summerhill.

3. Adaton Church, Starkville, ordained Brian Brasher as a minister of the gospel Apr. 18. He has served as Adaton's associate pastor of worship leadership since 2006. Shown are Junior Grantham, pastor J.D. Shaw, and Brasher.

4. Freeny Church, Carthage, recently held its annual Easter egg hunt. Shown are the participants.

5. Ladies of Springdale Church, Attala County, recently completed the Bible study Anointed, Redeemed: A Study of David. Shown are Lori Nowell, Brenda Nail, Annette Hood, Pearlean Cummins, Margie Killian, and Martha Dodd.

6. Pastor Dan Howard, Eugene Dobbs, and other members of First Church, Philadelphia, give cold water and mission information at Ham Jam Apr. 16.

7. Crossroads Counseling Center, Rankin Association, is adding a 2000 sq. ft. addition to its location. The small groups of Pinelake Church, Brandon, and the Brotherhood of Briar Hill Church, Florence, have provided demolition, foundation construction, and framing. Shown are members of Briar Hill.

8. The Kidz Praise Choir of First Church, Houston, recently held a food drive as one of their mission projects. All spaghetti sauce collected went to the church's food ministry, which feeds about 100 a month. Shown are the participants.

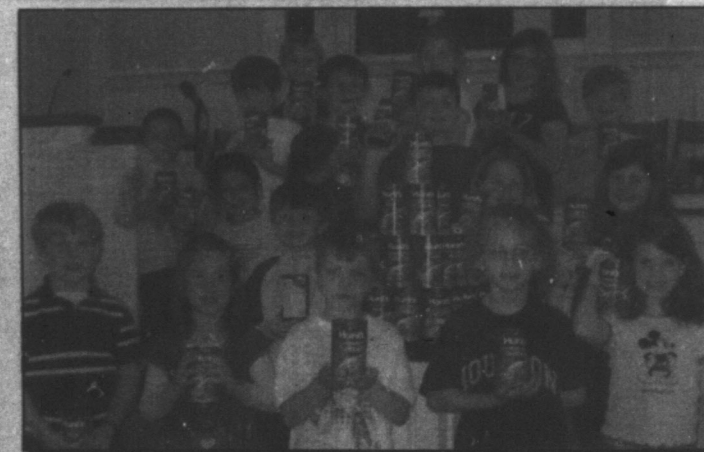
9. The RA's of First Church, Grenada, constructed crosses during Holy Week. Shown is one of the RA's.



6. First Church, Philadelphia



7. Crossroads Counseling Center, Rankin Association



8. First Church, Houston



9. First Church, Grenada

Crossover Orlando planning major evangelistic effort

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP) — Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Johnny Hunt has issued a God-sized challenge for 10,000 Baptists to come as volunteers for Crossover Orlando 2010 on Saturday, June 12.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful that instead of having 3,000 witnesses for Crossover in Orlando, we would have 10,000?" Hunt asked. "We would overwhelm that city with the love of God."

Crossover, now in its 22nd year, is a yearly evangelistic outreach to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the weekend before the SBC's annual meeting in the host city. This year's annual meeting will be June 15-16 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

Some 2.1 million people call Orlando home, according to Bill Faulkner, director of missions for the Greater Orlando Baptist Association.

Another 48-51 million from throughout the world visit Orlando's many tourist attractions and amusement parks each year.

"This gives us a tremendous opportunity to share the Gospel with the people who live here and with the people who come here," Faulkner said.

Dozens of events across three counties will give Crossover volunteers from Florida and across the nation opportunities to meet and witness to area residents and countless tourists in "a great home missions trip," said David Burton, director of the Florida Baptist Convention's evangelism division.

Crossover Orlando activities, some of which take place the week leading up to June 12, will attempt to span distance, generations, and languages, Faulkner noted. "We will be in every corner of the area because of the lostness of central Florida," he said.

Saturday block parties across Seminole, Osceola, and Orange counties will provide an outreach to residents of numerous neighborhoods, including those in the inner-city areas. A sports clinic will teach soccer to children in west Orange County and provide opportunities to reach residents from at least five cultures and languages, Faulkner said.

Volunteers in east Orlando, Kissimmee, and at First Church in Orlando will distribute food to needy residents who have signed up with door-to-door visitors in their neighborhoods.

The food distribution will be in cooperation with Convoy of Hope, a Springfield, Mo., organization that provides food and resources to churches and groups for community outreach.

Some 3,000 people are expected for a Hispanic family festival featuring food, games, music and speakers at the Central Florida Fairgrounds. Across town, International Drive — a popular tourist area — will be a "major touch point," Faulkner said. In addition, teams of teenagers will be Cross Changers in Orlando neighborhoods, making repairs to homes and community buildings while sharing their faith in Christ.

Clayton Cloer, pastor of First Church of Central Florida, is

the local coordinator for a neighborhood evangelistic effort that he hopes will involve 3,000 volunteers, paired into 1,500 teams, each knocking on 30 doors and sharing Christ with those willing to listen.

While teams visit in neighborhoods, others will visit nursing homes and assisted living facilities. "We want to give people access to the Gospel wherever their door is. We want Orlando to never be the same after this year's Crossover," Cloer said.

Cloer hopes Florida Baptist youth groups will take up the challenge of visiting and interacting with senior adults.

Several weekend events at First Church of Central Florida, meanwhile, will be designed to attract youth, including a Friday evening Strength Team performance and concert.

Cloer noted that Crossover Orlando organizers have simplified the process of becoming a Crossover volunteer. Although training for volunteers is planned for June 11 in Orlando, training also is available via the Web, at www.crossoverorlando.com, where volunteers also register and prayerwalk through the event venues.

Leading up to the Crossover events on Saturday will be Intentional Community Evangelism (ICE), beginning



TAKING IT TO THE STREETS — Thousands of people heard the Gospel as part of Crossover 2009 in Louisville, Ky. This year, Crossover Orlando will take place on Saturday, June 12. To volunteer or for more information, visit <http://crossoverorlando.com>.

on Monday, June 7.

"As part of this year's ICE effort in Orlando, we will cover the communities of 18 Orlando churches, double what we were able to do last year in Louisville," said Victor Benavides, who for the ninth straight year will coordinate ICE for the North American Mission Board in cooperation with the Greater Orlando Baptist Association and the Florida Baptist Convention.

Church communities covered by ICE volunteers in June will include not only Orlando but Oviedo, Apopka, Kissimmee and St. Cloud, Benavides said.

"Working with the local folks, we'll have two ICE leaders for every church location,"

he said. ICE volunteers will come from Florida and across the United States, along with evangelism students from Baptist seminaries including New Orleans, Southwestern, and Midwestern.

"We'll have an influx of first-time ICE volunteers this summer, so it's going to be exciting work to help strengthen churches, share Christ in the greater Orlando area and to see how God works and brings the ICE team together," Benavides said.

An ICE initiative for Orlando's Hispanic population will be conducted simultaneously because of the "large number of strong Hispanic churches in the area, some with hundreds of members each," Benavides noted.

Mississippi congressmen working to exclude abortion from health care

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — More than 50 other pro-life leaders have told the members of the U.S. House of Representatives they will work to restore pro-life policies undermined by the new health-care law and the subsequent executive order from U.S. President Barack Obama.

Meanwhile, a pro-life congressman has introduced legislation to amend the health-care measure to bar money for abortions in any program funded through the new law. Two Democratic Mississippi congressmen have signed on as co-sponsors of the bill.

In a letter to the House, Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, and his fellow pro-lifers pointed to what they described as the "anti-life policies" in the legislation, but they gave most of their attention to the shortcomings they saw in the executive order.

The order fails to apply the principles of the Hyde Amendment to the health-care law, they said. The Hyde Amendment prohibits Medicaid and other funds through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from paying for most abortions.

In pointing to the inadequacies of Obama's executive order, the pro-life advocates said:

- It directs the HHS secretary to issue regu-

lations that will establish "accounting schemes so that taxpayer subsidies may pay for insurance coverage that includes abortion" and "implement the abortion surcharge that will require many Americans to pay at least \$1 per month into an abortion slush fund to directly pay for elective abortions;"

- It fails to reverse measures in the law that enable the federal government to administer insurance plans for its employees that fund abortion;

- It does not invalidate language that would mandate abortion coverage in all plans if HHS defines the procedure "as a preventive service;"

- It does not include conscience protections for pro-life, health-care workers.

Rep. Joseph Pitts, R-Pa., introduced the Protect Life Act, H.R. 5111, April 22. When introduced, the bill had 50 co-sponsors, including seven Democrats.

The Democrats co-sponsoring Pitts' bill are Reps. Travis Childers of Mississippi's First Congressional District; Gene Taylor of Mississippi's Fourth Congressional District; Lincoln Davis of Tennessee; Tim Holden of Pennsylvania; Dan Lipinski of Illinois; Jim Marshall of Georgia; and Mike McIntyre of North Carolina.

Childers is a member of East Booneville Church, Booneville.

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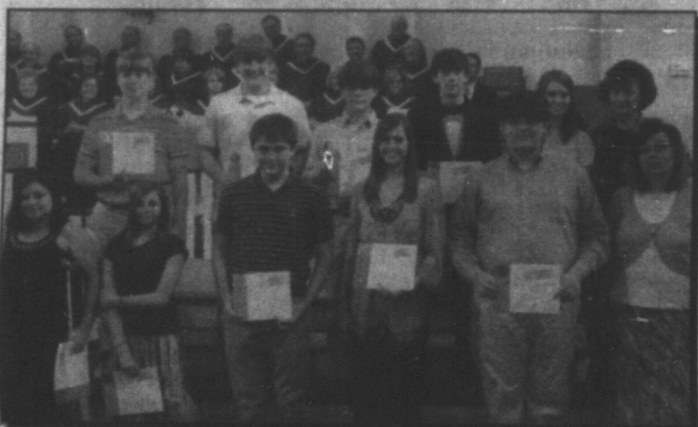
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BIBLE DRILLS



1a. First Church, Carthage, children



1b. First Church, Carthage, youth

1. **First Church, Carthage**, recognizes its children's and youth Bible drillers.
2. **Freeny Church, Carthage** recognizes its youth and children's Bible drillers and their Bible Buddies: front, Alana Patterson, Carley Collier, Hannah Eubanks, Mallory Long, Nicolas Sprayberry, and Brooks McDill; back, Anthony Harkins, Savannah Alford, and Victoria Sprayberry.
3. **Magnolia Church, Laurel**, recognizes their Bible drillers. Shown are leader Gail James, Taylor Thompson, and Joshua Pugh.
4. **Ackerman Church, Ackerman** recognizes its Bible drillers participating in the state drill: Hayes Wood, Rylee Bowman, Halea Woods, Chloe Jenkins, Michelle Parker, and leaders Alison Burney and Kristen Black.



2. Freeny Church, Carthage



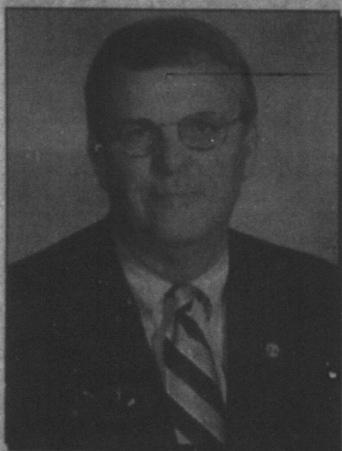
3. Magnolia Church, Laurel



4. Ackerman Church, Ackerman

COLLEGE NEWS

1. The Winters School of Music at William Carey University will present the Chorale in concert Thursday, April 29 at 7:30 p.m. in the Smith Auditorium on the Hattiesburg campus. The concert is free to the public. For more information call 601-318-6175.



2. McKenzie

2. Danny McKenzie, sports information director at Blue Mountain College for the past two years, has been named the Toppers golf coach. McKenzie, a lifelong golfer whose 30-year newspaper career included several years reporting on golf from high school to professional levels, will coach both men's and women's teams in the fall when BMC launches its NAIA program in TranSouth Athletic Conference.

3. The twenty-fifth annual Mary Starke Harper Conference on the Elderly Mississippian with a Mental Handicap will be held April 30 in the Smith Auditorium at William Carey University, beginning at 8:30 a.m. The conference is designed for students in pre-professional training as well as psychologists, registered nurses, social workers, counselors, and other professionals in the field of mental health. Registration is \$40 at the door. Undergraduate students will pay \$5. The fee includes the luncheon and break refreshments. For information call (601) 318-6416 or (601) 318-6122 or email paul.cotten@wmcarey.edu.



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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE In the Presence of God

Genesis 1:26-28a; 2:7, 15-22

By Marion D. Duncan

The May unit, "I (Still) Do," through selected Old and New Testament passages explores the biblical perspective of marriage and society's effort to redefine marriage.

"In the presence of God..." the title of this first lesson, is a phrase from the traditional wedding vows many of us repeated when we exchanged vows with our marriage partner, but it describes literally the position of Adam and Eve when God presented Eve to Adam as his helpmeet. Taking place at the pinnacle of creation, the importance of marriage in the eyes of the Creator is evidenced in God's anticipation of Adam's need (Genesis 2:18) and the "creation of woman as the crowning act of creation." (Exploring Genesis, John Phillips)

Many literary scholars believe Genesis 1 may be the greatest piece of literature ever written. Moses did not write Genesis 1 according to theories of creation current in the schools of his day which abounded in mythology, but gave a remarkable statement of fact that is the "only document coming to us from antiquity that is seriously considered when the origin of the universe is discussed." (Phillips)

Peter Stoner, a mathematician, lists these thirteen steps of creation in Genesis: creation of the universe (v. 1), light (v. 3), darkness dispelled from the earth (v. 4), the atmosphere established (v. 6), the seas appointed their boundaries (v. 9), the continents raised (v. 10), plant life formed, namely, grasses, herbs, and fruit trees (v. 11) the sun, moon, and stars



Duncan

appointed to function (v. 14), marine life created (v. 20), fowls created (v. 21), the age of the monsters decreed (v. 21), the creation of land vertebrates and "creeping things" (v. 24), and man created (v. 26).

Those things are not only correctly named and listed in their proper order, but also Moses' chances of writing Genesis 1 in that way by accident would amount to one chance in 31 sextillion (31 followed by 21 zeros). (Phillips) Stoner contends that Moses could not have written Genesis 1 from human reasoning, but only by divine revelation as seen in his faith concept of creation—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (NIV)

A word study lends even more authenticity to the writer's inspiration by the Holy Spirit. The name of God, Elohim, is plural, but used with a singular verb, indicating the plentitude of God's power. The singular verb indicates that the subject is one in the sense of

being perfectly unified. The creation was caused by God, and God alone. Create means "bring into being" using no pre-existing material and warrants this New Testament interpretation, "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the work of God, so what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear." (Hebrews 11:3) Made applies to God's using pre-existing material and immediate causes. That is development, not creation. (A Survey of New Testament Teaching, J. Wash. Watts) Men can make things, but only God can create. In verse 21, created is used a second time and recognizes the distinctive faculties of living creatures from the inanimate creations in previous verses.

The plural pronouns in verse 26, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." following the plural attribute of the name of God appear to reference the other members of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man's body was made from pre-existing material—the dust of the ground—but he was

created in God's own image, the third incidence of creation. "In his nature, person, and personality, in his moral and spiritual capacities, in his emotions, intellect, conscience, and will man stands apart from the brute creation." (Phillips) God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" and put into man the part of man that is in His image. Man alone has the capacity to know the mind and will of God.

God gave Adam a home in the garden and an occupation—gardener and guardian of the garden. His plan from the beginning was to provide for Adam a wife—a helpmeet, "a help corresponding to him, equal and adequate to himself." (Hebrew and English Lexicon) Dr. John A. Sampey expressed beautifully this correspondence as "not made out of his head to rule him; nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him; but out of his side to be equal to him; under his arm to be protected; and near his heart to be loved by him."

Duncan is a member of First Church, Macon.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE What if you falter?

Exodus 32:1-4, 30-34; 34:6b

By Shelby Hazzard

How We Falter - Ex 32:1-4

Exodus 32:4 - He [Aaron] took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." (NIV)

Moses was on the mountain for forty days and nights receiving the covenant Law from God while the Israelites grew impatient. The tribes and clan leaders "gathered around" Aaron and said, "Come make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

Aaron quickly gave in to their desire, collected gold earrings from all of them, melted them and made them into an idol. "The idol was a calf, a young bull, the symbol of virile power."

(Expositor's Bible Commentary, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., 4/78) This was a blatant violation of the first and second commandment they had just received from God, days before. Why this gross failure so soon?

Faltering comes from misplaced fear. Instead of fearing starvation, poverty, loneliness, death or man, we should fear the invisible God revealed in Christ. Matthew 10:28 says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

When We Falter - Ex. 32:30-34

Exodus 32:31-32 - So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the



Hazzard

book you have written." (NIV)

God commanded Moses to return to the camp for the people had been "quick to turn away from what He had commanded and His anger burned against them." God desired to destroy them and

make a new nation from Moses instead of the tribes of Israel! Moses intervened and reminded the Lord of His covenant promises with the Patriarchs and the Lord "relented."

Moses returned to the camp and enraged by Aaron's failure and Israel's debauchery, smashes the stone tablets on the ground and burns the golden calf making Israel drink its ashes in water. Aaron blames the entire situation on Israel, attempting to dodge his failure as a leader. Moses calls out to faithful Israel and the Levites respond with their swords drawn for purification of the camp. 3,000 fellow Israelites were killed for apostasy, an

unthinkable and tragic situation, yet necessary.

The next day, Moses, at his own initiative, goes to the Lord and offers to "make atonement" for Israel's sin. He confesses the people's sin, seeks forgiveness and offers God his life for their sin. God refuses. He will hold each person liable for their sins and consequently strikes Israel with a plague for their idolatry.

As with Israel, we are in dire need of repenting of our sins and seeking forgiveness from God in Christ because unresolved sin remains alive and can harm us, "The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them." (1 Tim 5:24)

Although We Falter -

Ex. 34:6b-9

Exodus 34:6 - 7 "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for

the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

After the tragedy of the golden calf, God and Moses have an intense time of fellowship followed by broad sweeping repentance by the Israelites. God repeatedly assures Moses of His presence, "I will go with you, and I will give you rest." Moses requests that God show him "His glory," God agrees, places Moses in the "cleft in the rock," and passes by him, showing Moses His back.

The Lord commands Moses to "chisel out" two more stone tablets and come up the mountain where he would give Moses the Ten Commandments, renewing His covenant with Israel forgiving their sins.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Is there something in your life right now that is faltering toward God? What are you going to do about it?

Hazzard is minister of evangelism, First Church, Greenville.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

THE BAPTIST
Record



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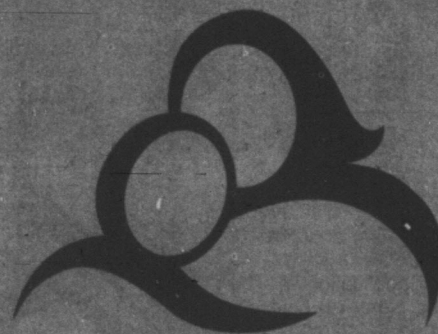
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Food Revolution got its start at W.Va. Baptist church

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. (BP) — The final episode of Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution aired April 23 on ABC. Some of the scenes in the finale will look familiar: They were filmed in the parking lot of suburban First Church of Kenova.

Billed as a "Cooking Boot Camp," the event had the feel of a community festival. First Church roped off the parking lot and set up several tents for healthy cooking demonstrations and pep talks by British chef Jamie Oliver.

First Church teaching pastor Steve Willis worked in a tent where Oliver showed parents how to pack healthy lunches. Willis created fruit-based smoothies that included yogurt and nuts.

"I'm glad it's wrapping up," Willis said of the attention generated by the six-week reality TV show. "Dozens of churches — not just in America, but throughout the world — are calling and sending me e-mails, saying, 'What are you guys doing? We've got the same problem here.'"

While Oliver has become a local celebrity thanks to the visibility of the national broadcast, his visit originated with First Church. The church instituted exercise classes after a fall 2008 report from the Centers for Disease Control listed the Huntington area as the nation's unhealthiest.

"We knew it was a problem," Willis said, "because I was in the hospital all the time, seeing people die from obesity-related diseases or having all these surgeries. We had the most obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, gum disease, sleep habits, and the worst exercise habits."

After Willis preached about obesity, 40 people answered an

altar call to enlist in its "Biggest Loser" program. Despite its success, Willis later told his wife he didn't know anything about proper eating.

Last year, the day after he prayed, "Lord, I need somebody to come in and teach nutrition," Oliver's production crew called. They had read a story online about the church's health initiative and wanted to help.

"The fact they called the next day — I knew God was sending the guy here," Willis said.

The Food Revolution series has generated curiosity seekers, including a couple from London who wanted to meet Willis. Visitors from other nations and states also have shown up, making the church a bit of a tourist attraction, the pastor said. Sunday attendance averages about 400.

While the public spotlight will fade after the series finale, the church's healthy emphasis will continue. In addition to opening its family life center three hours a day for walking, First Church hosts aerobics on Monday nights and Zumba classes on Tuesdays.

Collectively, participants in its exercise program have shed a ton of weight, including one woman who has lost 75 pounds and another who dropped 70 pounds.

Church member Stacie Edwards, whose family was featured prominently in the first two episodes, has lost 20 pounds. Her husband Tim also has lost 20 pounds and son Justin is 35 pounds lighter.

Though initially skeptical of Oliver's efforts, Stacie Edwards said she is off medications she had been taking and is much happier today. The family recently dug up the deep fat fryer it buried during the first episode in order to

clear the ground for a vegetable garden.

"Jamie was there and backed us up for so many weeks," Edwards said. "He was in our lives for three months. It seemed like it woke me up. I think that's what I needed, to be awakened and humbled."

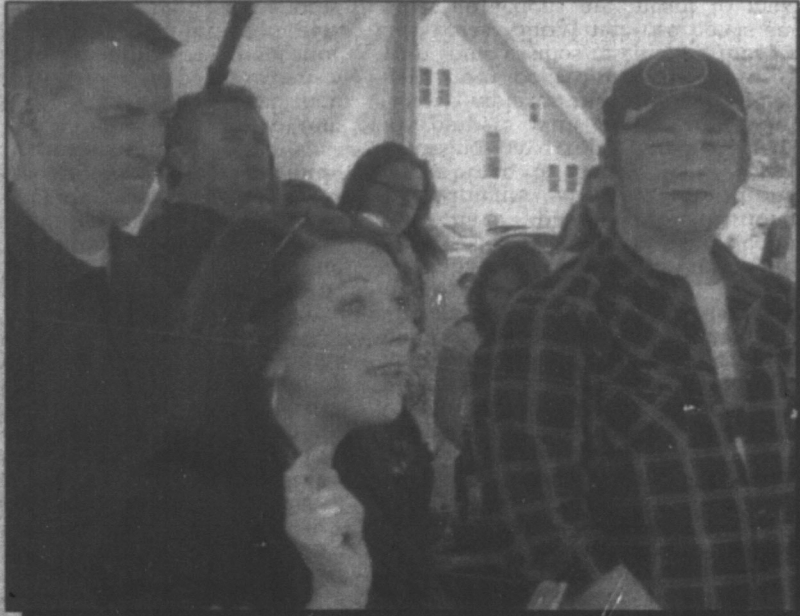
Barbara Hicks, one of the cooks who prepare meals for Wednesday night dinners at the church, said the Food Revolution has made her more aware of the need to choose healthier products. The menu for the April 21 fellowship dinner included hot chicken salad, lettuce topped with herbed tomatoes, oven-roasted asparagus, and French bread.

Hicks said the crew now fixes more salads and uses fewer mayonnaise-based dressings, roasts its vegetables, and has cut out the use of most canola oil and butter.

A widow who lives alone, Hicks said in the past she was tempted to grab a sandwich at home but instead makes a salad or fresh entrée. "I've just become more aware it is better to eat healthy food than to have all that fat in the arteries," Hicks said.

Longtime First Church member Richard Lykins said he has purchased a treadmill, is taking more hikes with his family, and is choosing water over soda.

A supervisor at an area chemical plant, Lykins said he has had to make an effort to eat healthier at work because when men cook there the food is often fattening. Crediting a recent five-pound



SLIMMER, HEALTHIER — British chef Jamie Oliver (right), at his final Food Revolution episode in Huntington, W.Va., is joined by teaching pastor Steve Willis of First Baptist Church of Kenova (left) and Ashley Thompson, project manager of the Huntington's Kitchen ministry, a local venue called "Jamie's Kitchen" during the TV series. (BP photo)

weight loss to awareness spread by the church's emphasis and Jamie Oliver's show, Lykins said the changes have been "great."

"I think it's sparked everyone to be accountable for their health and to take care of themselves and their family," Lykins said. "I think it's going to help not only now, but generations from now."

Church member Jane Galloway, who helps supervise those who walk at the family life center on Monday mornings, hopes the changes will filter down to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"You have to start small and do it all your life," said Galloway, whose mother and

some relatives died at a young age because of heart disease. "We have a lot of unhealthy children. I have a grandchild who lives on chicken nuggets, so I'm hoping this will affect her. We've got to start young and bring 'em up right."

At the other end of the age scale, Willis can already see a change. Despite one of the area's harshest winters in years, he didn't officiate at any funerals in recent months where a death was related to obesity.

In the past, "It seemed like every other week I was doing a funeral of somebody who was dying before their time," the pastor said.

Alabama governor overrules attorney general gambling order

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP) — The governor of Alabama has ordered the state's attorney general to cease efforts to interfere with the Task Force on Illegal Gambling as a battle over the legality of electronic bingo machines continues to escalate.

Attorney General Troy King, a southern Baptist, said in March he would take over the task force, which was established by Gov. Bob Riley, also a Southern Baptist, in 2008 to enforce the state's gambling laws.

On April 7, Riley sent a letter to King advising him that he is exercising the supreme executive power granted to the governor under the state constitution, overruling King's directives to the task force to turn over all of the evidence they have collected regarding electronic bingo machine operators in the five Alabama counties in question.

"The attorney general has apparently forgotten what our constitution says," Riley said April 9. "Let me remind him. There are three coequal branches of government. I'm not over the judicial branch or the legislative branch, but the constitution gives me supreme authority over the executive branch. The attorney general is a member of the executive branch."

The two leaders have been at odds over electronic bingo machines, which

the governor says are illegal and the attorney general says could be legal in some cases. Riley's task force has raided some Alabama casinos, a move King says is wrong.

Riley instructed task force members to ignore a letter from King and to continue to fulfill their assigned duties. The state Supreme Court is due to take up the dispute between the governor and the attorney general.

Meanwhile, a federal investigation into possible corruption in the Alabama legislature pertaining to gambling has begun. The state Senate passed a bill that supposedly would allow voters to decide whether electronic bingo machines, which are similar to slot machines, should be legal in the state, and the legislation is awaiting a vote by the House of Representatives.

The Public Integrity Section of the U.S. Department of Justice is investigating reports that certain legislators were offered substantial campaign contributions in exchange for their votes in support of bingo legislation. The Birmingham News said April 11.

At least two lawmakers reportedly were asked by federal authorities to wear listening devices to eavesdrop on conversations with fellow lawmakers,

lobbyists, and others who support gambling legislation, the newspaper said.

Riley noted that the Senate bill doesn't call for an "up or down vote" on gambling because even if voters overwhelmingly rejected the ballot measure, casinos would not be forced to close their doors. He complained that it is a win-win ballot initiative for casino owners.

"What I want people to know is this is not an up or down vote on gambling," Riley said. "This is not a yes or no vote on gambling. If it was, I'm not too sure too many people would oppose it, but that's not what it is. This is about a bill that is corrupt to the core."

The Senate bill redefines bingo to include machines that perform the game without player interaction and allows an unlimited number of gambling operations around the state. It also establishes a five-member state gaming commission appointed under the heavy influence of the Senate.

The drawn-out battle over gambling in Alabama has generated thousands of dollars in taxpayer expenses. The governor's office has spent more than \$536,000 on legal fees from gambling cases and has requested another \$600,000 to cover future expenses, The News said.

Todd Stacy, the governor's press secretary, said casino owners are responsible for the legal costs, not the governor. "They want to delay the final ruling on their machines as long as possible, so they file bogus lawsuits and insist on the longest path that will cost the taxpayers the most money," Stacy told The News. "That's how they hope to win: Drag it out and ratchet up the costs to discourage the state from continuing."

Last fall the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that electronic bingo machines are in fact an illegal form of gambling because the machines "have none of the elements of human skill and interaction that are fundamental to the game of bingo."

Alabama's constitution explicitly forbids slot machines, but some counties have passed constitutional amendments allowing traditional paper bingo for charity.

Casinos have cropped up in Alabama to compete with Mississippi's Gulf Coast complexes, and millions of dollars have been poured into the industry, with some casinos resembling those in Las Vegas. Glitzy high-rise hotels and other attractions are meant to make Alabama a vacation destination, the gambling industry says.